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Morishima

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(54) **SEMICONDUCTOR MEMORY DEVICE WITH DATA RETENTION CHARACTERISTIC OF IMPROVED STABILITY**

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(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**[7] **G11C 5/06**
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **365/63**; 365/230.03
(58) **Field of Search** 365/63, 230.03, 365/233, 754

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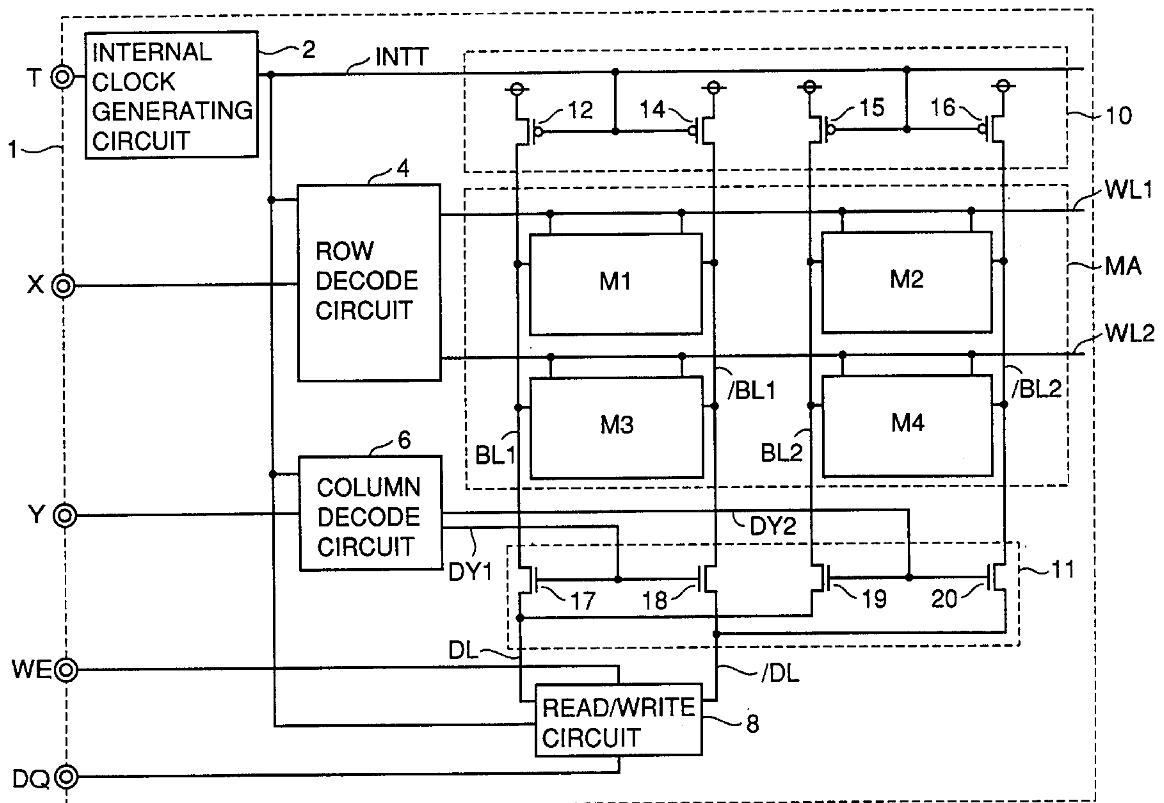
(57) **ABSTRACT**

During standby, bit lines BL1 and /BL1 are precharged, and the potentials of word lines WL1 and WL2 are set at a potential slightly higher than a ground potential. Since a stable retaining current flows through an access transistor into a node inside a memory cell holding the H level, the data can be retained with stability. Moreover, during an access, the selected word line is brought to the H level, while the unselected word lines are brought to a ground potential.

14 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets



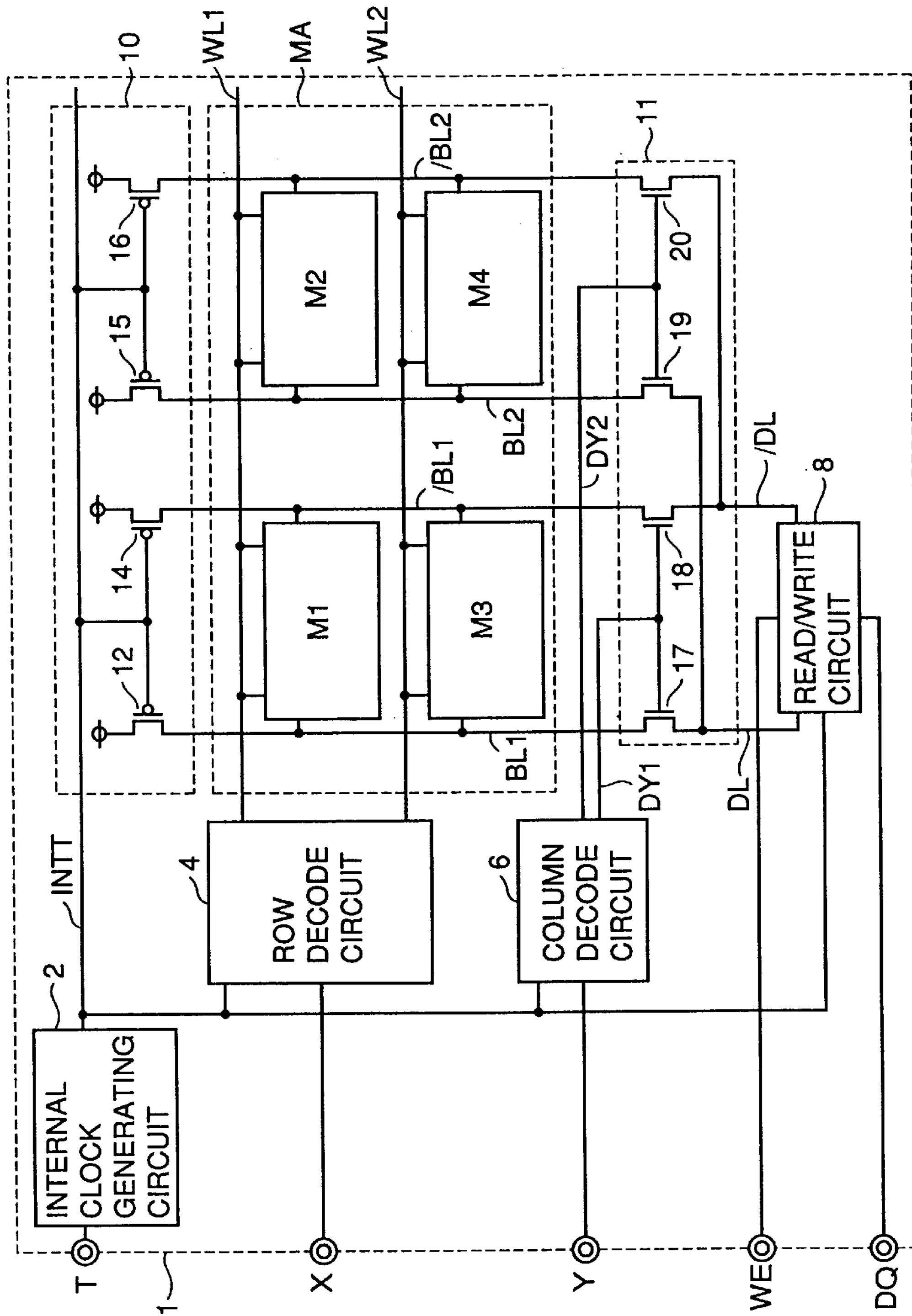


FIG. 1

FIG. 2

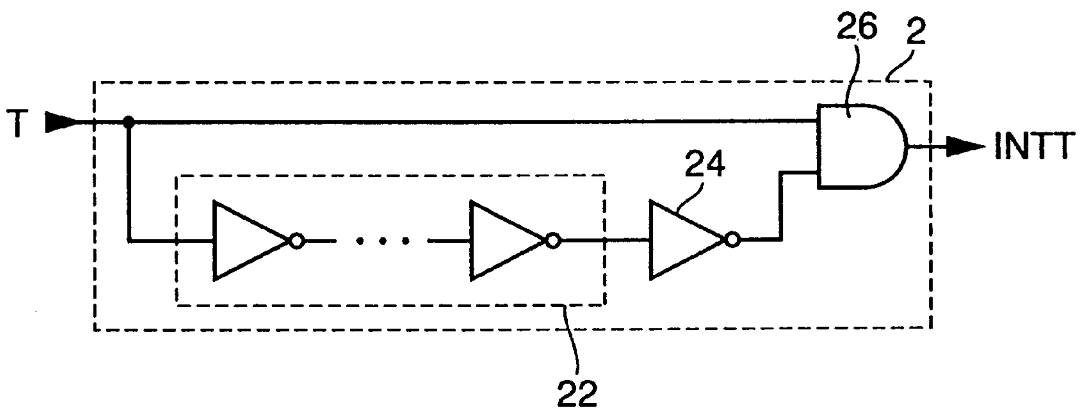


FIG. 3

4
34
32
42
44
N4
46
38
INTT
N2
50
N1
WL1
48
52
36
54
X
56
N3
60
WL2
58
62
64
66
40

FIG. 4

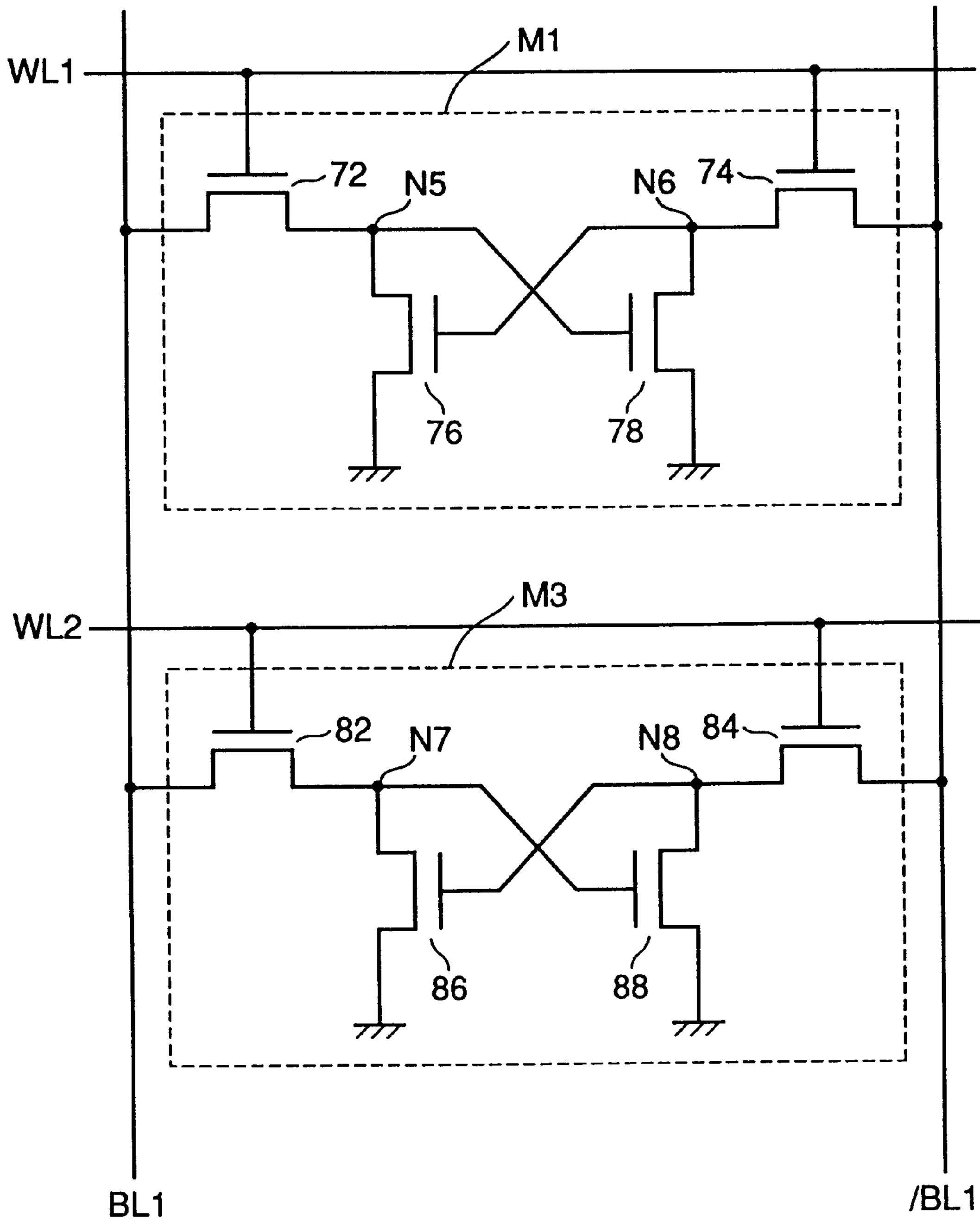


FIG. 5

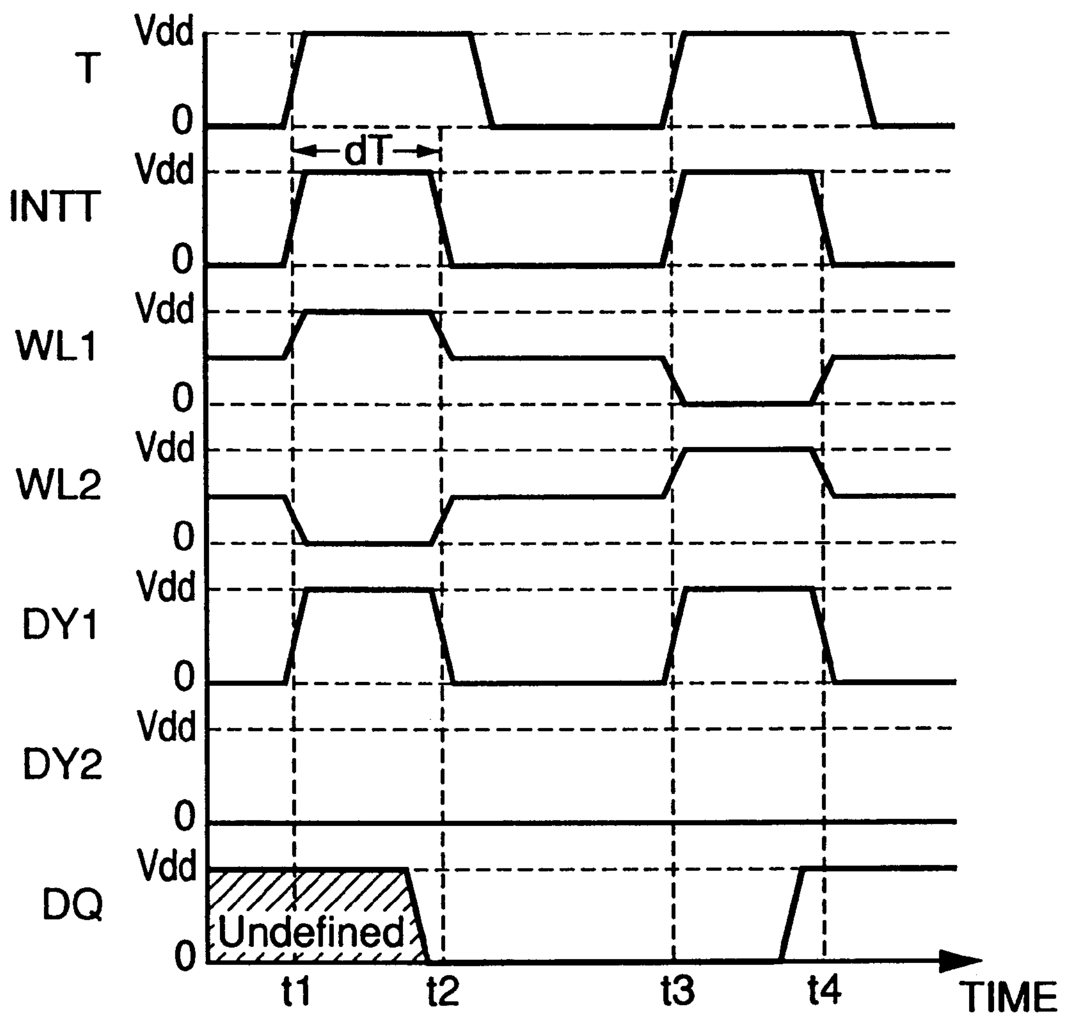


FIG. 6

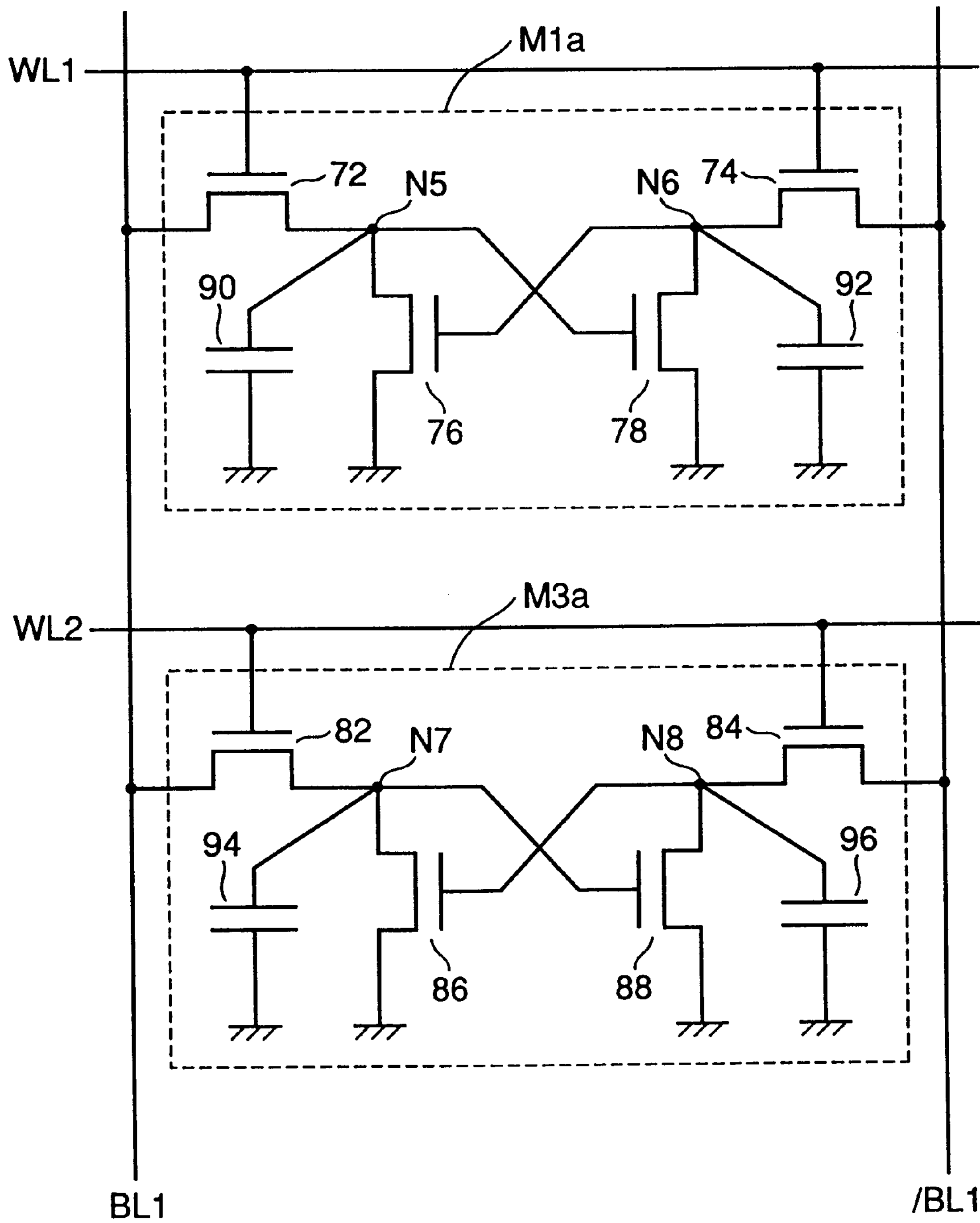


FIG. 7

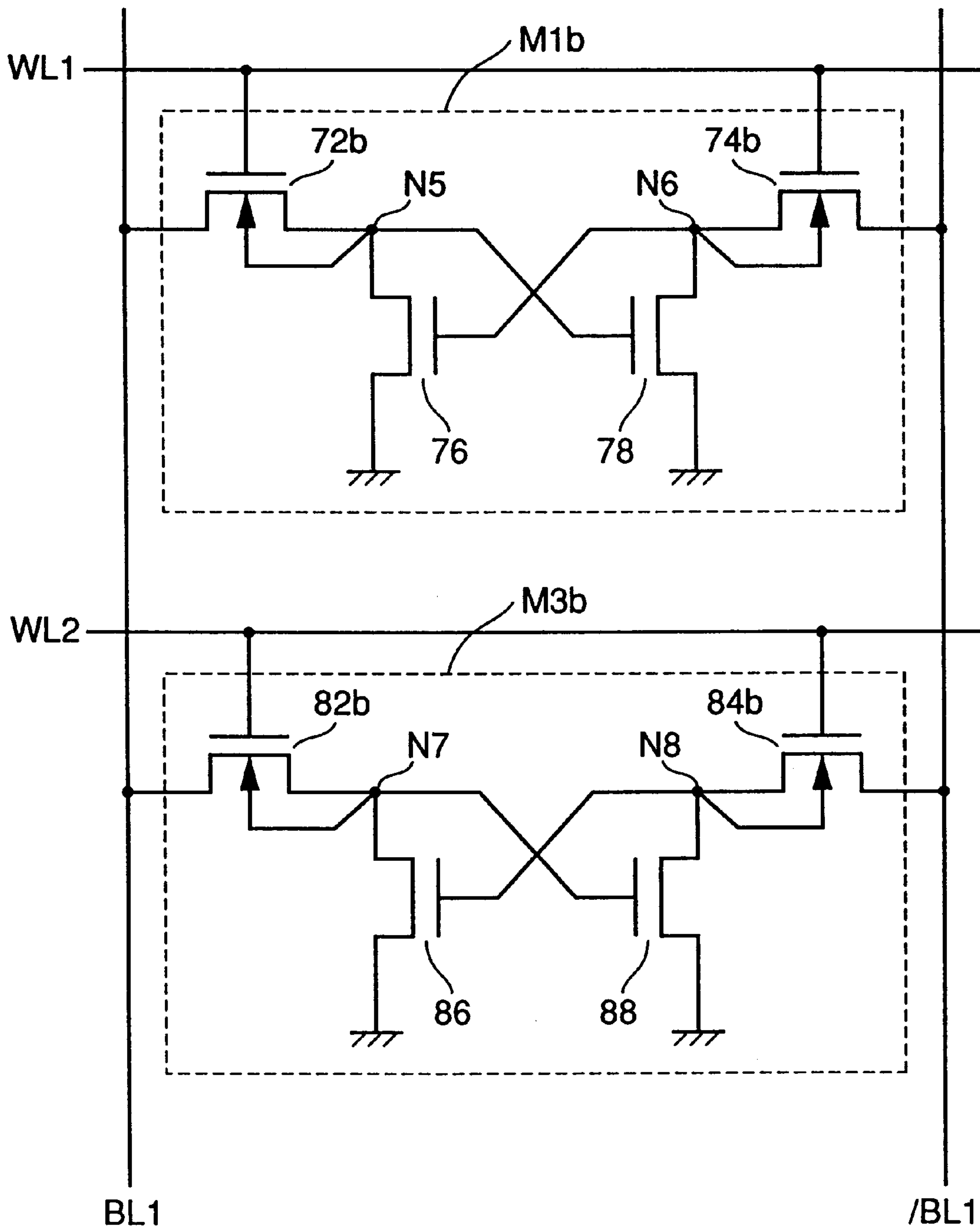


FIG. 8

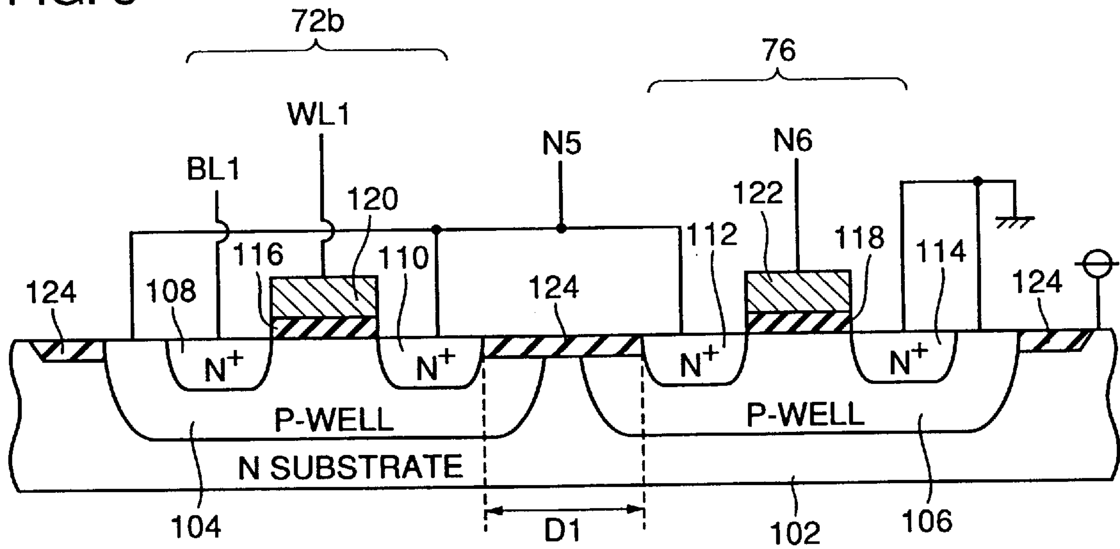


FIG. 9

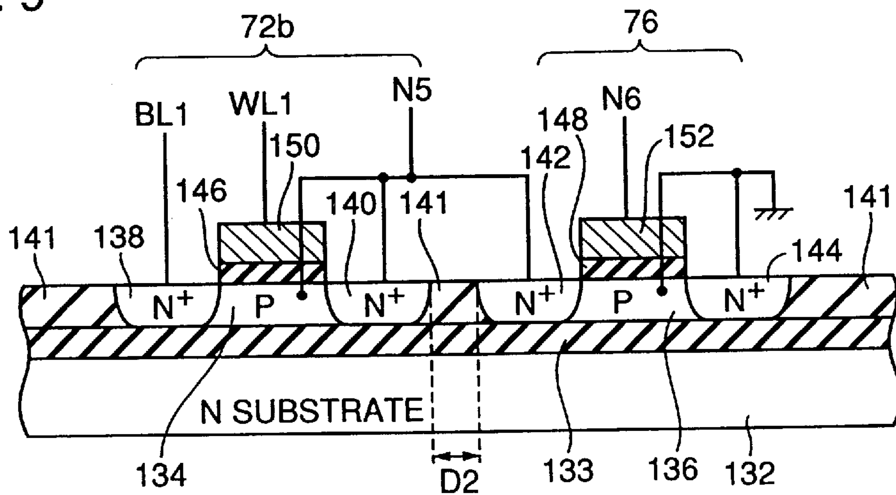


FIG. 10

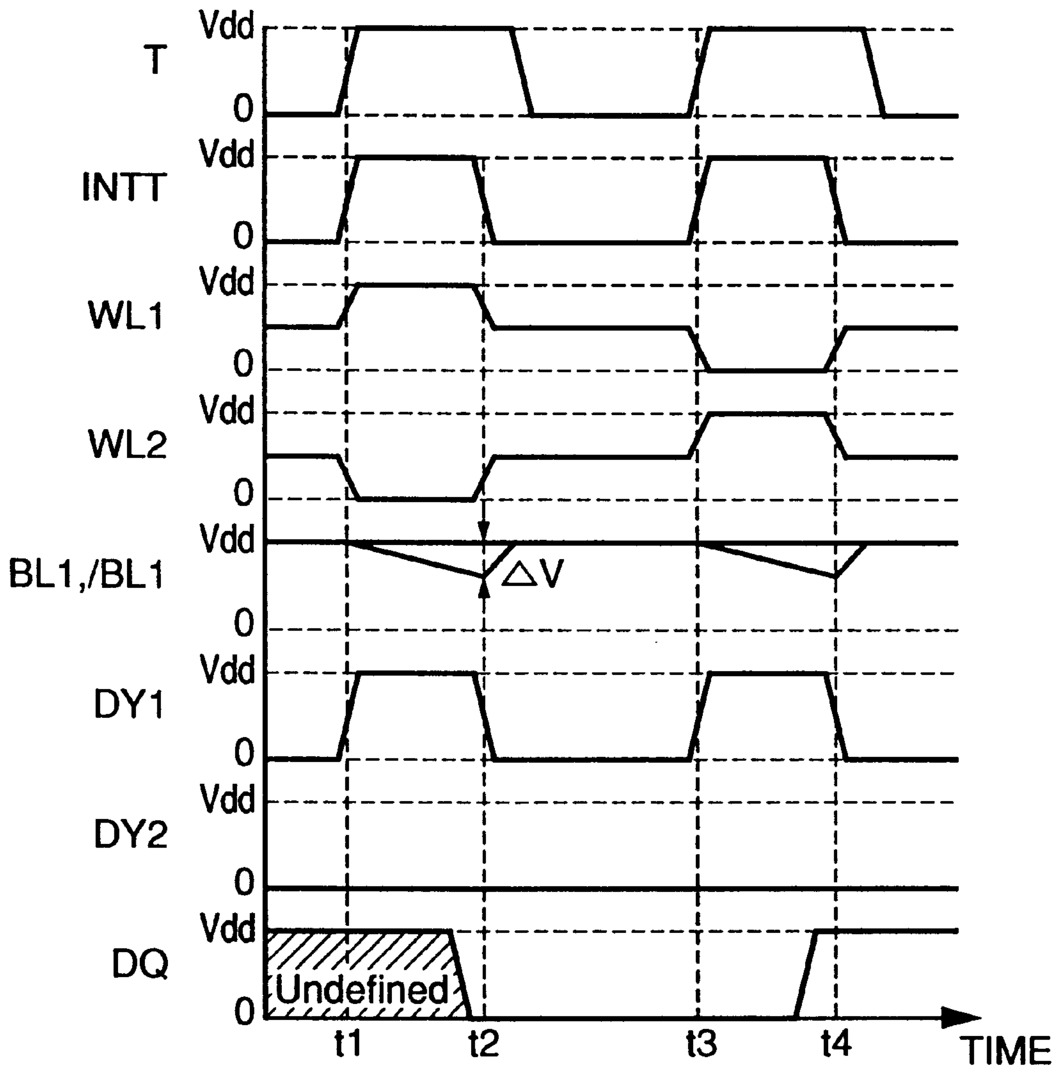


FIG. 11

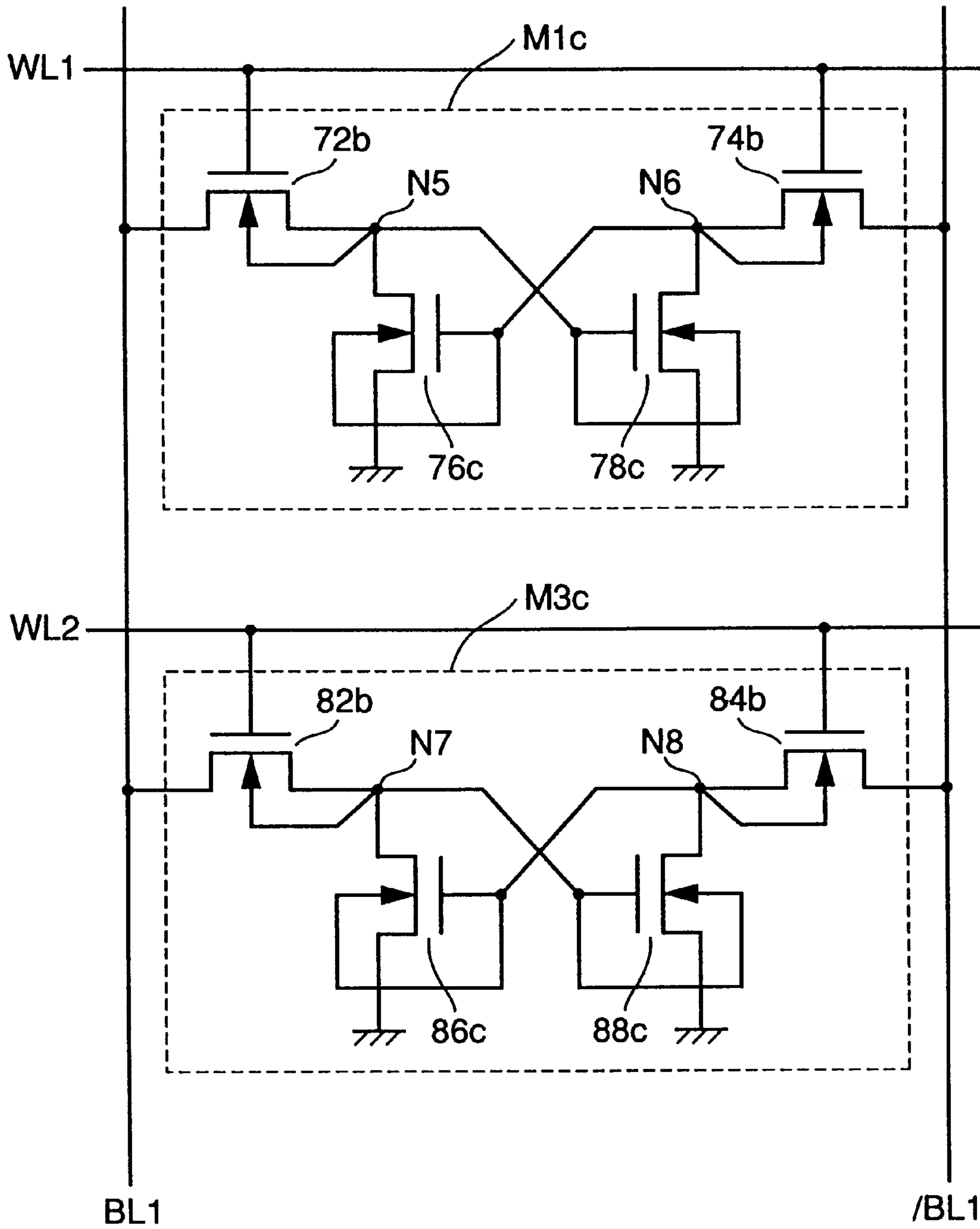


FIG. 12

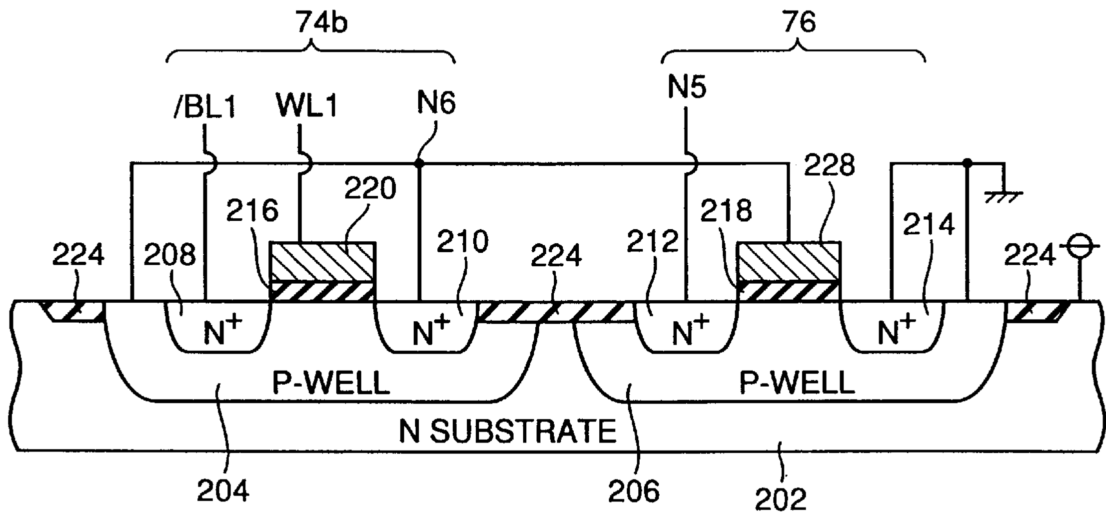
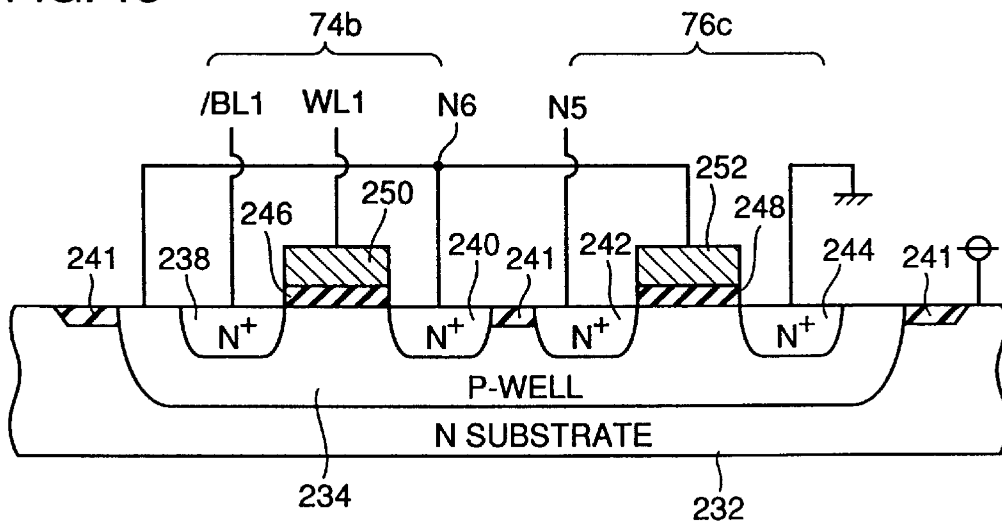


FIG. 13



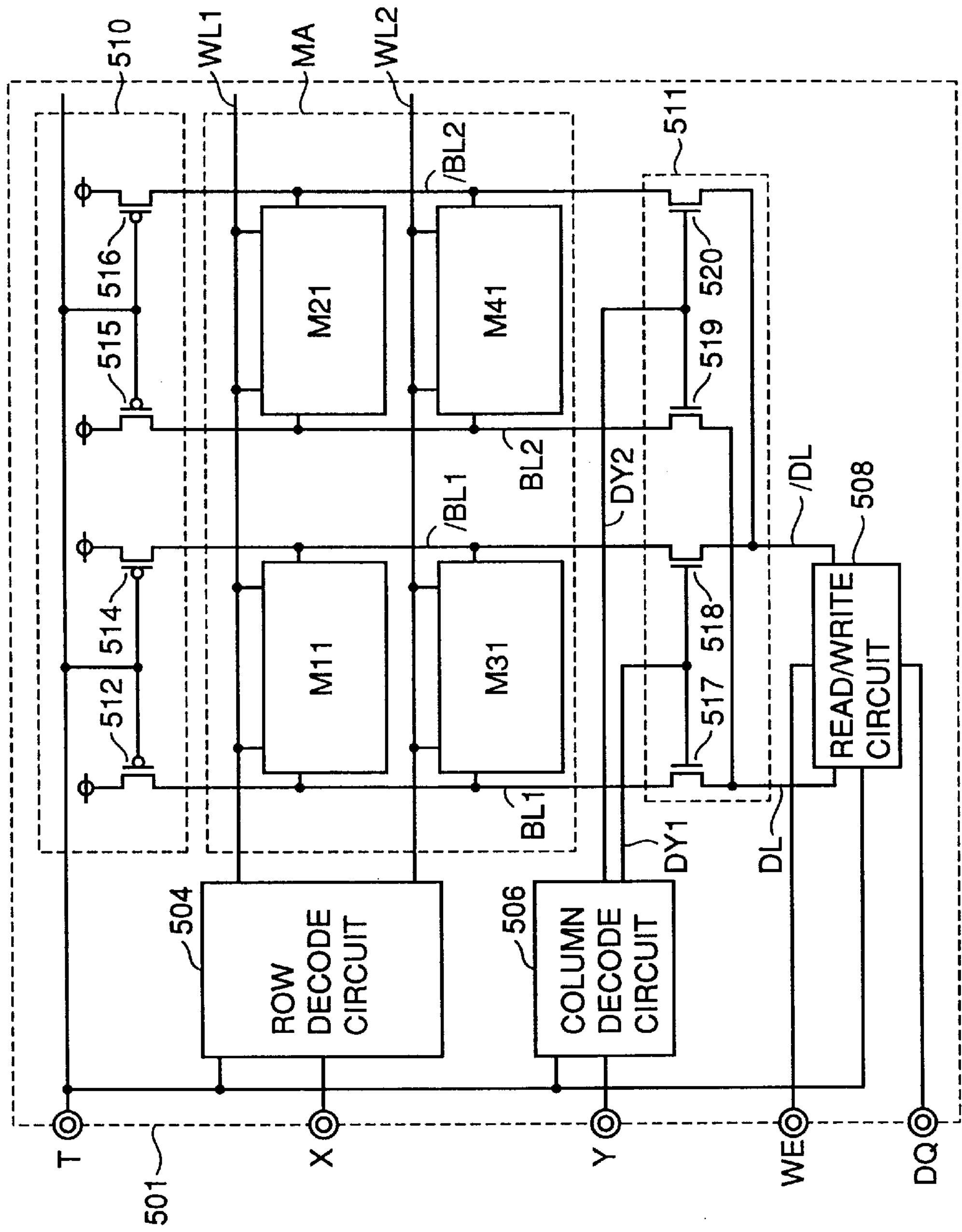
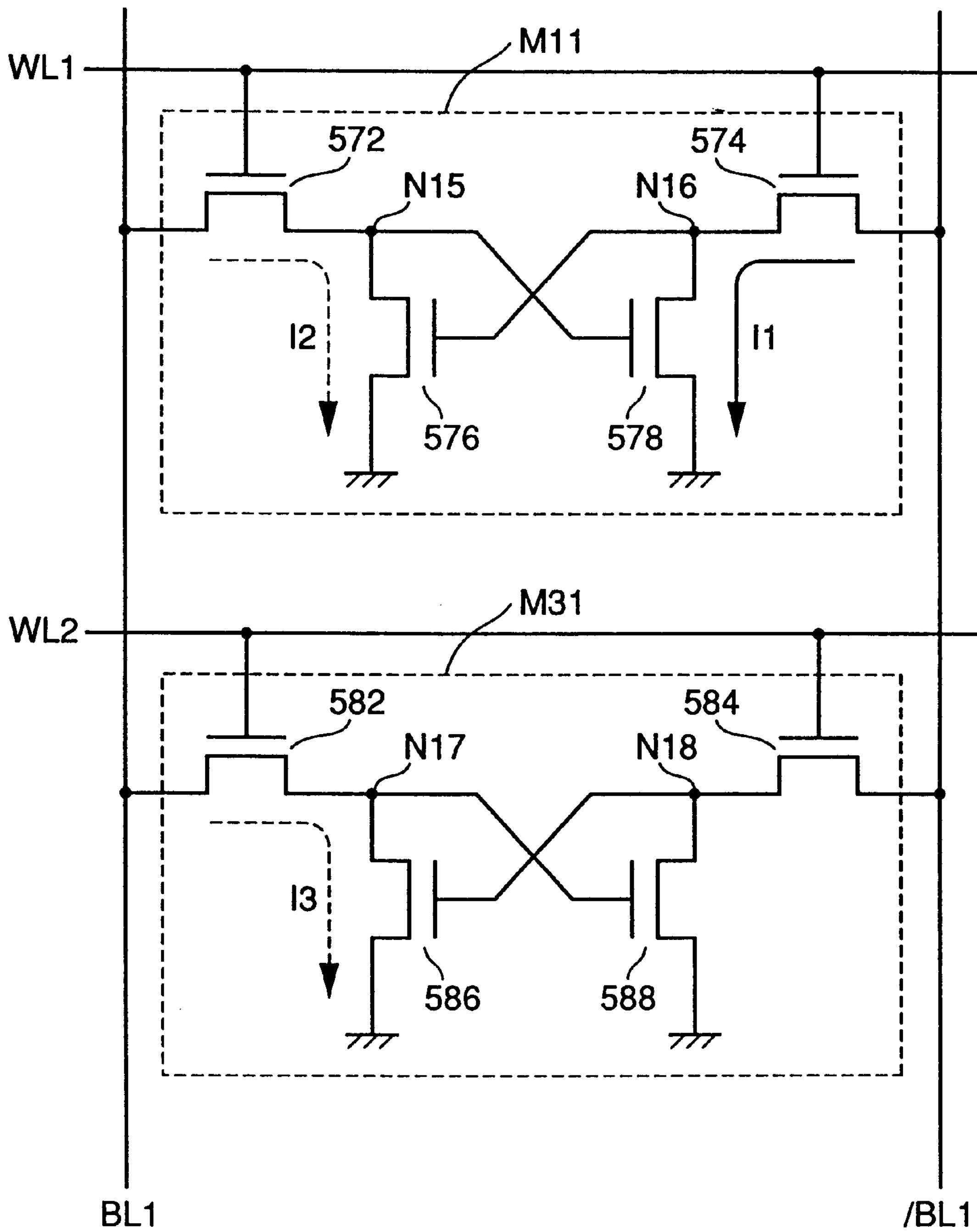


FIG. 14 PRIOR ART

FIG. 15 PRIOR ART



SEMICONDUCTOR MEMORY DEVICE WITH DATA RETENTION CHARACTERISTIC OF IMPROVED STABILITY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a semiconductor memory device, and more specifically, to a static semiconductor memory device not requiring a refresh operation.

2. Description of the Background Art

Along with technological advances, electrical equipments are expected to handle more and more information. Accordingly, a semiconductor memory device of a greater capacity is required.

Since one bit of memory cell can be formed by two circuit elements in a dynamic random access memory (DRAM), a DRAM is most suitable for implementing a large capacity semiconductor memory device. On the other hand, a static random access memory (SRAM) excels the DRAM in speed and in power consumption, and is easy to use since no refresh operation is required. As a result, an SRAM is frequently used in a field where performance is a priority, or in a small-scale memory system in which a complex control is not performed. An SRAM normally requires six elements for one bit of memory cell.

In the case of a high-resistance-load cell, four MOS transistors and two high resistance elements form one bit of memory cell.

The large number of elements required per one bit put the SRAM at a great disadvantage in implementing a large capacity semiconductor memory device when compared with a DRAM, however.

To compensate for this disadvantage, an SRAM is proposed in which, instead of providing a high resistance element for data retention, a bit line is precharged and the leakage current flowing through an access transistor is used to retain the data.

FIG. **14** is a block diagram representing the configuration of a conventional semiconductor memory device **501**.

As shown in FIG. **14**, semiconductor memory device **501** includes a memory array MA containing memory cells **M11**, **M21**, **M31**, and **M41** arranged in a matrix of rows and columns, a word line **WL1** for selecting memory cells **M11** and **M21**, a word line **WL2** for selecting memory cells **M31** and **M41**, bit lines BL1 and /BL1 provided corresponding to memory cells **M11** and **M31**, bit lines BL2 and /BL2 provided corresponding to memory cells **M21** and **M41**, and a precharging circuit **510** for precharging bit lines BL1, /BL1, BL2, and /BL2 according to a clock signal T.

Semiconductor memory device **501** further includes a row decode circuit **504** for activating word lines WL1 and WL2 according to clock signal T and a row address signal X, a column decode circuit **506** for outputting column select signals DY1 and DY2 according to clock signal T and a column address signal Y, a transfer gate circuit **511** for connecting one of bit lines BL1 and BL2 to a data line DL and one of bit lines /BL1 and /BL2 to a data line /DL according to column select signals DY1 and DY2, and a read/write circuit **508** for writing an input/output data signal DQ into a memory cell according to a write control signal WE during a data write operation and for outputting data read from a memory cell as input/output data signal DQ during a data read operation.

Here, a memory cell array including memory cells arranged in two rows and two columns is shown for simplicity. In practice, a memory cell array includes a greater number of memory cells arranged in a matrix of rows and columns.

FIG. **15** is a circuit diagram showing the configuration of memory cells **M11** and **M31** shown in FIG. **14**.

As shown in FIG. **15**, memory cell **M11** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **572** connected between bit line BL1 and a node **N15** and having, a gate connected to word line WL1, an N-channel MOS transistor **574** connected between bit line /BL1 and a node **N16** and having a gate connected to word line WL1, an N-channel MOS transistor **576** connected between node **N15** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N16**, and an N-channel MOS transistor **578** connected between node **N16** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N15**.

N-channel MOS transistors **572** and **574** are referred to as access transistors, and N-channel MOS transistors **576** and **578** are referred to as driver transistors.

Memory cell **M31** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **582** connected between bit line BL1 and a node **N17** and having a gate connected to word line WTL2, an N-channel MOS transistor **584** connected between bit line /BL1 and a node **N18** and having a gate connected to word line WL2, an N-channel MOS transistor **586** connected between node **N17** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N18**, and an N-channel MOS transistor **588** connected between node **N18** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N17**.

In memory cells **M21** and **M41** shown in FIG. **14**, bit lines BL2 and /BL2 respectively replace bit lines BL1 and /BL1 in the configuration of memory cells **M11** and **M31** shown in FIG. **15**. The internal configuration of memory cells **M21** and **M41** are the same as that of memory cells **M11** and **M31** so that the description thereof will not be repeated.

Now, the operation of a conventional semiconductor memory device will be described briefly below.

Referring to FIGS. **14** and **15**, let us assume that memory cell **M11** retains the data of the logic high or H Level as the potential of node **N15** and that memory cell **M31** retains the data of the logic low or L level as the potential of node **N17**.

While clock signal T is at the L level, all word lines WL1 and WL2 and column select signals DY1 and DY2 are at a ground potential so that none of the memory cells is selected.

At this time, P-channel MOS transistors **512** to **516** contained in precharging circuit **510** are rendered conductive, and bit lines BL1, /BL1, BL2, and /BL2 are respectively charged to a power-supply potential.

In addition, the H level data held by node **N15** in memory cell **M11** is retained by the leakage current from N-channel MOS transistor **572** which is an access transistor.

In other words, the potential of node **N15** is determined based on the ratio of the respective resistance values of N-channel MOS transistors **572** and **576** both in the inactive state. If the potential of node **N15** is higher than the threshold voltage of N-channel MOS transistor **578**, node **N16** attains the ground potential, and the data stored in memory cell **M11** is retained.

When clock signal T attains the H level, the read operation begins, and word line **WL1** and column select signal **DY1** attains the H level. Consequently, memory cell **M11** is selected.

When word line **WL1** attains the H level, a current **I1** flows in from bit line /**BL1** into memory cell **M11**. On the other hand, from bit line BL1, a leakage current **I2** flows in

toward a ground node via N-channel MOS transistor **576** in the inactive state and a leakage current **I3** flows into the unselected memory cell **M31**. The sum of these leakage currents is sufficiently smaller than the current that flows into memory cell **M11** from bit line /**BL1**. Therefore, a potential difference is generated between bit lines **BL1** and /**BL1**. This potential difference is amplified by read/write circuit **508** and is output to the outside as input/output data signal DQ.

When clock signal T once again attains the L level, the access to the memory cell is completed.

Once again, all word lines **WL1** and **WL2** and column select signals **DY1** and **DY2** attain the ground potential. Bit lines **BL1**, /**BL1**, **BL2**, and /**BL2** are charged by precharging circuit **510**, and the H level data held by node **N15** in memory cell **M11** is also charged by the leakage current from N-channel MOS transistor **572** which is an access transistor.

By precharging a bit line in order advantageously to utilize the leakage current from an access transistor for data retention, a memory cell of an SRAM can be configured with four elements. As a result, an SRAM of a larger capacity than that having a memory cell configured with six elements can be easily produced. In addition, since no refresh operation as required by a DRAM is necessary, an easy-to-use SRAM can be provided.

A conventionally proposed semiconductor memory device is configured in the above-described manner, where the H level data within memory cells are retained by the leakage currents of access transistors.

The leakage currents of access transistors have a significant characteristic variation, however. In other words, the leakage currents vary from one access transistor to another of, for instance, more than a million access transistors within one chip. If there is an access transistor whose leakage current is exceptionally large, the standby current would be increased. On the contrary, if there is an access transistor whose leakage current is exceptionally small, it would be impossible to retain the H level data.

Thus, the problem was that it was difficult to produce transistors whose values of leakage currents required for data retention are uniform.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the present invention is to provide a semiconductor memory device having a small chip area and being capable of retaining data with stability.

In short, the present invention is a semiconductor memory device formed on a main surface of a semiconductor substrate and provided with a memory array, a plurality of word lines, a plurality of bit line pairs, a row select circuit, and a precharging circuit.

The memory array includes a plurality of memory cells arranged in a matrix of rows and columns. The plurality of word lines are provided respectively to rows of the plurality of memory cells. The plurality of bit line pairs each include first and second bit lines and are respectively provided to columns of the plurality of memory cells.

Each of the plurality of memory cells includes first and second access transistors having their respective gates connected to a same one of the plurality of word lines and connecting the first and second bit lines respectively to first and second internal nodes, a first driver transistor connected between a power-supply node to which an inactivating potential is provided and the first internal node and having a gate connected to the second internal node, and a second driver transistor connected between the power-supply node to which the inactivating potential is provided and the second internal node, and having a gate connected to the first internal node.

The row select circuit, when making an access to the memory array, selects one of the plurality of word lines according to a row address signal, provides an activating potential to the selected word line, and provides an inactivating potential to the unselected word lines. Moreover, when the access to the memory array is completed, the row select circuit provides an intermediate potential between the activating potential and the inactivating potential to the plurality of word lines.

The precharging circuit precharges the plurality of bit lines after the access to the memory array is completed.

Thus, the main advantages of the present invention are that a memory cell can stably retain the H level data since the current required for the stable data retention can be obtained from a precharged bit line by controlling the potential of a word line such that a leakage of a suitable size occurs in an access transistor during standby, and that the production margin of the characteristics for a transistor is increased so that the design is facilitated.

The foregoing and other objects, features, aspects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of the present invention when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram representing the configuration of a semiconductor memory device **1** according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **2** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of an internal clock generating circuit **2** shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of a row decode circuit **4** shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells **M1** and **M3** shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **5** is an operational waveform chart related to the description of the operation of semiconductor memory device **1** shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **6** is a circuit diagram showing the structure of memory cells according to a variation of the first embodiment.

FIG. **7** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells **M1*b*** and **M3*b*** contained in a semiconductor memory device according to a second embodiment.

FIG. **8** is a across sectional view of a memory cell shown in FIG. **7** formed by an ordinary bulk CMOS (Complementary Metal-Oxide Semiconductor) process.

FIG. **9** is a cross sectional view of a memory cell shown in FIG. **7** produced by an SOI (Silicon On Insulator) process.

FIG. **10** is an operational waveform chart related to the description of the operation of the semiconductor memory device according to the second embodiment.

FIG. **11** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells **M1*c*** and **M3*c*** contained in a semiconductor memory device according to a third embodiment.

FIG. **12** is a across sectional view showing a cross section of N-channel MOS transistors **14*b*** and **76** shown in FIG. **7** according to the second embodiment.

FIG. **13** is a cross sectional view related to the description of a cross section of a memory cell shown in FIG. **11**.

FIG. **14** is a block diagram representing the configuration of a conventional semiconductor memory device **501**.

FIG. **15** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells **M11** and **M31** shown in FIG. **14**.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail below in relation to the drawings. Throughout the drawings, the same reference characters indicate the same or corresponding parts.

First Embodiment

FIG. **1** is a block diagram representing the configuration of a semiconductor memory device **1** according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. **1**, semiconductor memory device **1** includes a memory array MA including memory cells **M1**, **M2**, **M3**, and **M4** arranged in a matrix of rows and columns, a word line **WL1** for selecting memory cells **M1** and **M2**, a word line **WL2** for selecting memory cells **M3** and **M4**, bit lines **BL1** and **/BL1** correspondingly provided to memory cells **M1** and **M3**, bit lines **BL2** and **/BL2** correspondingly provided to memory cells **M2** and **M4**, and an internal clock generating circuit **2** for outputting an internal clock signal INTT according to a clock signal T.

Semiconductor memory device **1** further includes a precharging circuit **10** for precharging bit lines **BL1**, **/BL1**, **BL2**, and **/BL2** according to internal clock signal INTT, a row decode circuit **4** for activating word lines **WL1** and **WL2** according to internal clock signal INTT and a row address signal X, a column decode circuit **6** for outputting column select signals **DY1** and **DY2** according to internal clock signal INTT and a column address signal Y, a gate circuit **11** for connecting one of bit lines **BL1** and **BL2** to a data line DL and for connecting one of bit lines **/BL1** and **/BL2** to a data line /DL according to column select signals **DY1** and **DY2**, and a read/write circuit **8** for writing an input/output data signal DQ into a memory cell according to a write control signal WE during a data write operation and for outputting the data read from a memory cell as input/output data signal DQ during a data read operation.

Precharging circuit **10** includes a P-channel MOS transistor **12** connected between a power-supply node and bit line **BL1** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate, a P-channel MOS transistor **14** connected between a power-supply node and bit line **/BL1** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate, a P-channel MOS transistor **15** connected between a power-supply node and bit line **BL2** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate, and a P-channel MOS transistor **16** connected between a power-supply node and bit line **/BL2** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate.

Gate circuit **11** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **17** activated according to column select signal **DY1** for connecting bit line **BL1** to data line DL, an N-channel MOS transistor **18** activated according to column select signal **DY1** for connecting bit line **/BL1** to data line /DL, an N-channel MOS transistor **19** activated according to column select signal **DY2** for connecting bit line **BL2** to data line DL, and an N-channel MOS transistor **20** activated according to column select signal **DY2** for connecting bit line **/BL2** to data line ADL.

FIG. **2** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of internal dock generating circuit **2** shown in FIG. **1**.

As shown in FIG. **2**, internal clock generating circuit **2** includes a delay circuit **22** for receiving and delaying a clock signal T, an inverter **24** for receiving and inverting an output from delay circuit **22**, and an AND circuit **26** for receiving clock signal T and an output from inverter **24**. AND circuit **26** outputs an internal clock signal INTT.

Delay circuit **22**, for instance, is formed by inverters of even-numbered stages connected in series.

FIG. **3** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of row decode circuit **4** of FIG. **1**.

As shown in FIG. **3**, row decode circuit **4** includes an inverter **32** for receiving and inverting an internal clock signal INTT, an inverter **34** for receiving and inverting an output from inverter **32** and for outputting the inverted output to a node **N1**, an inverter **36** for receiving and inverting a row address signal X, a selecting circuit **38** for outputting to word line **WL1** one of an output from inverter **34** and an output from inverter **36** according to internal clock signal INTT, and a selecting circuit **40** for outputting to word line **WL2** one of row address signal X and the output from inverter **34** according to internal clock signal INTT.

Inverter **34** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **46** having a source connected to a ground node and having a gate and a drain connected to a node **N4**, and a P-channel MOS transistor **42** and an N-channel MOS transistor **44** which are connected in series between a power-supply node and node **N4**, and both of which receive the output from inverter **32** at their respective gates. The node connecting P-channel MOS transistor **42** and N-channel MOS transistor **44** outputs the output of inverter **34** which is provided to node **N1**.

Selecting circuit **38** includes an inverter **48** for receiving and inverting internal clock signal INTT, a P-channel MOS transistor **50** connected between node **N1** and a node **N2** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate, an N-channel MOS transistor **52** connected between node **N1** and node **N2** for receiving an output from inverter **48** at a gate, a P-channel MOS transistor **54** connected between an output node of inverter **36** and node **N2** for receiving the output from inverter **48** at a gate, and an N-channel MOS transistor **56** connected between the output node of inverter **36** and node **N2** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate.

Selecting circuit **40** includes an inverter **58** for receiving and inverting internal clock signal INTT, a P-channel MOS transistor **60** connected between node **N1** and a node **N3** for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate, an N-channel MOS transistor **62** connected between node **N1** and node **N3** for receiving an output from inverter **58** at a gate, a P-channel MOS transistor **64**, connected between a node receiving a row address signal X and node **N3**, for receiving the output from inverter **58** at a gate, and an N-channel MOS transistor **66**, connected between the node receiving row address signal X and node **N3**, for receiving internal clock signal INTT at a gate.

FIG. **4** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells **M1** and **M3** in FIG. **1**.

As shown in FIG. **4**, memory cell **M1** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **72** connected between a bit line **BL1** and a node **N5** and having a gate connected to a word line **WL1**, an N-channel MOS transistor **74** connected between a bit line **/BL1** and a node **N6** and having a gate connected to word line **WL1**, an N-channel MOS transistor **76** connected between node **N5** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N6**, and an N-channel MOS transistor **78** connected between node **N6** and a ground node and having a gate connected to node **N5**.

N-channel MOS transistors **72** and **74** are referred to as access transistors, and N-channel MOS transistors **76** and **78** are referred to as driver transistors.

Memory cell **M3** includes an N-channel MOS transistor **82** connected between bit line **BL1** and a node **N7** and

having a gate connected to a word line WL2, an N-channel MOS transistor **84** connected between bit line /BL1 and a node N8 and having a gate connected to word line WL2, an N-channel MOS transistor **86** connected between node N7 and a ground node and having a gate connected to node N8, and an N-channel MOS transistor **88** connected between node N8 and a ground node and having a gate connected to node N7.

In memory cells M2 and M4 shown in FIG. **1**, bit lines BL2 and /BL2 respectively replace bit lines BL1 and /BL1 in the configuration of memory cells M1 and M3 shown in FIG. **4**. The internal configuration of the memory cells are the same so that the description thereof will not be repeated.

FIG. **5** is an operational waveform chart related to the description of the operation of semiconductor memory device **1** shown in FIG. **1**.

Referring to FIGS. **1** and **5**, let us first assume that node N5 in memory cell M1 stores the L level data as its initial state, and node N7 in memory cell M3 stores the H level data.

While clock signal T is at the L level, internal clock signal INTT is also at the L level.

At this time, the potential of node N1 in FIG. **3** which is an internal node of row decode circuit **4** is set higher from the ground potential by the threshold voltage of N-channel MOS transistor **46**. N-channel MOS transistor **46** has its gate connected to its drain so that the current flowing through N-channel MOS transistor **46** becomes small when the potential of the drain falls down to around the level of the threshold voltage. The potential of node N1 at this time is output to all word lines WL1 and WL2 via selecting circuits **38** and **40**.

The H level data held in node N7 of FIG. **4** is retained by the current flowing from bit line BL1 via N-channel MOS transistor **82**. The current value required for data retention can be set by adjusting the L level of the potential of a word line. This adjustment is effected by setting the L level output by inverter **34** shown in FIG. **3** to a potential slightly higher than a ground potential by the provision of N-channel MOS transistor **46**.

At time t1, clock signal T rises and a read operation from memory cell M1 begins.

Word line WL1 and column select signal DY1 attain the H level so that memory cell M1 is selected. At this time, the unselected word line WL2 is at the L level. The H level of word line WL1 is determined by the H level output by inverter **36**. The L level of word line WL2 is determined by the L level of row address signal X.

When word line WL1 attains the H level, a current flows from bit line BL1 into node N5 in FIG. **4**. At this time, word line WL2 is at a ground potential and N-channel MOS transistor **82** is in the non-conductive state so that bit line BL1 is unaffected by memory cell M3.

Memory cell M3 of FIG. **4** which is unselected during a read operation retains the data by two transistors, N-channel MOS transistors **86** and **88**, since the access transistors are in the non-conductive state. Consequently, after a long period of time, the H level data held in node N7 is corrupted by the leakage current from node N7 into the substrate and the leakage current of N-channel MOS transistor **86**, and so on. The data, however, can be retained by the parasitic capacitance of node N7 and the like for a sufficiently short period of time.

In order to extend this time of data retention, capacitors can be provided to nodes N7 and N8 as will be described later.

The potential difference generated between bit lines BL1 and /BL1 is amplified by read/write circuit **8** and is output to the outside as input/output data signal DQ.

Moreover, a clock pulse width dT of internal clock signal INTT can be set by the delay time of delay circuit **22** shown in FIG. **2**.

At time t2, internal clock signal INTT falls to the L level, and the access is completed.

Once again, all word lines attain a potential between a ground potential and a power-supply potential, that is, the L level output by inverter **34** shown in FIG. **3**.

The bit lines are once again charged by precharging circuit **10**, and the H level data held by the memory cell is retained by the current through the access transistor.

Then, at time t3, the read operation from memory cell M3 begins.

At this time, word line WL2 and column select signal DY1 attain the H level so that memory cell M3 is selected. Word line WL2 attains the H level according to row address signal X and word line WL1 attains the L level.

At time t4, the data read operation from memory cell M3 is completed, and internal clock signal INTT falls. Then once again, each bit line is charged, going back to the initial state.

As shown above, the row decode circuit that drives a word line sets the L level of the word line slightly higher than a ground potential during standby so that a greater leakage current flows through the access transistor than in the case of the conventional semiconductor memory device. Thus, by precharging a bit line to the H level, the memory cell can reliably retain the H level data. As a result, the production margin of the characteristics for a transistor is increased, facilitating the design.

FIG. **6** is a circuit diagram representing the structure of memory cells according to a variation of the fast embodiment.

As shown in FIG. **6**, the variation of the first embodiment differs from the first embodiment in that the former includes memory cells M1*a* and M3*a* in place of memory cells MI and M3. In addition to the configuration of memory cell M1 shown in FIG. **4**, memory cell M1*a*includes a capacitor **90** connected between node N5 and a ground node and a capacitor **92** connected between node N6 and a ground node. The configuration of other parts is the same as memory cell M1 shown in FIG. **4**, and the description thereof will not be repeated.

Memory cell M3*a* differs from memory cell M3 shown in FIG. **4** in that the former further includes a capacitor **94** connected between node N7 and a ground node and a capacitor **96** connected between node N8 and a ground node in addition to the configuration of memory cell M3 shown in FIG. **4**. The configuration of other parts is the same as memory cell M3 shown in FIG. **4** so that the description will not be repeated.

Such a configuration allows the H level held by the memory cell to be retained even when time of access dT to the memory cell shown in FIG. **5** is relatively long.

Second Embodiment

The semiconductor memory device according to the second embodiment differs from the semiconductor memory device according to the first embodiment in the configuration of memory cells M1, M2, M3, and M4.

FIG. **7** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells M1*b* and M3*b* contained in the semiconductor memory device according to the second embodiment.

As shown in FIG. **7**, in memory cell M1*b*, an N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **72** and an N-channel MOS transistor **74***b* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **74** in the configuration of memory cell M1 shown in FIG. **4**.

N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* has a back gate connected to node **N5**. In other words, the P-well in which N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* is formed is connected to node **N5**. N-channel MOS transistor **74***b* has a back gate connected to node **N6**. In other words, the P-well in which N-channel MOS transistor **74***b* is formed is connected to node **N6**.

In memory cell M3*b*, an N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **82** and an N-channel MOS transistor **84***b* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **84** in the configuration of memory cell M3 shown in FIG. **4**.

N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* has a back gate connected to node N7.

In other words, the P-well in which N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* is formed is connected to node **N7**. N-channel MOS transistor **84***b* has a back gate connected to node **N8**. In other words, the P-well in which N-channel MOS transistor **84***b* is formed is connected to node **N8**.

In order to implement such a configuration, the well of each access transistor must be isolated. Such isolation of wells is made possible without the increase in layout area, for example, by using the SOI process as will be described below.

The overall configuration of the second embodiment is the same as that of the first embodiment shown in FIG. **1** so that the description will not be repeated.

Moreover, the same circuit as that used in the conventional example, that is, a circuit that uses the L level of a word line during standby as a ground potential can be employed as a row address decoder. In the second embodiment, however, a circuit shown in FIG. **4** is employed.

FIG. **8** is a cross sectional view of a memory cell shown in FIG. **7** formed by an ordinary bulk CMOS process.

As shown in FIG. **8**, P-wells **104** and **106** are formed on a main surface of an N substrate **102**. N-type impurity regions **108** and **110** are formed within P-well **104**. A gate oxide film **116** is formed on the main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **108** and **110**, and a gate electrode **120** is formed on gate oxide film **116**. These described elements correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **72***b*.

On the other hand, N-type impurity regions **112** and **114** are formed within P-well **106**. A gate oxide film **118** is formed on the main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **112** and **114**, and a gate electrode **122** is formed on gate oxide film **118**. An insulating film **124** for separating the transistors is provided in the region between N-type impurity regions **110** and **112**.

N-type impurity region **108** is connected to bit line **BL1**, and gate electrode **120** is connected to word line **WL1**. N-type impurity region **110**, P-well **104**, and N-type impurity region **112** are connected to node **N5**. Gate electrode **122** is connected to node **N6**. N-type impurity region **114** and P-well **106** are coupled to a ground potential.

In such a structure, N-type impurity region **110** and N-type impurity region **112** must be set apart by a distance **D1** in order to separate the potential of P-well **104** from the potential of P-well **106**.

FIG. **9** is a cross sectional view of a memory cell shown in FIG. **7** produced by SOI process.

As shown in FIG. **9**, an insulating film **133** is formed on an N substrate **132**. On insulating film **133** are formed N-type impurity regions **138**, **140**, **142**, and **144**, P-type body regions **134** and **136**, and an insulating film region **141** for separating the transistors.

A gate oxide film **146** is formed on P-type body region **134**, and a gate electrode **150** is formed above gate oxide film **146**.

A gate oxide film **148** is formed on P-type body region **136**, and a gate electrode **152** is formed above gate oxide film **148**.

N-type impurity regions **138** and **140**, P-type body region **134**, gate oxide film **146**, and gate electrode **150** correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* shown in FIG. **7**. Therefore, by applying a potential to P-type body region **134**, the potential can be applied to the back gate of N-channel MOS transistor **72***b*.

N-type impurity regions **142** and **144**, P-type body region **136**, gate oxide film **148**, and gate electrode **152** corresponded to N-channel MOS transistor **76** in FIG. **7**. Therefore, by applying a potential to P-type body region **136**, the potential can be applied to the back gate of N-channel MOS transistor **76**.

N-type impurity region **138** is connected to bit line **BL1**, and gate electrode **150** is connected to word line **WL1**. P-type body region **134** and N-type impurity regions **140** and **142** are connected to node **N5**. Gate electrode **152** is connected to node **N6**. P-type body region **136** and N-type impurity region **144** are coupled to a ground potential.

By adapting the SOI process, a distance D2 between the edges defining the region that separates N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* from N-channel MOS transistor **76** can be made smaller than in the case shown in FIG. **8**.

FIG. **10** is an operational waveform chart related to the description of the operation of the semiconductor memory device according to the, second embodiment.

Referring to FIGS. **7** and **10**, initially, while clock signal T is at the L level, row decode circuit **4** causes all word lines to attain a potential between a ground potential and a power-supply potential.

Assuming that node **N5** is at the L level, the well potential of N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* is at the ground potential so that N-channel MOS transistor **72***b* has the same characteristics as an ordinary access transistor.

On the other hand, assuming that the potential of node N7 is at the H level, in N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* which is an access transistor, the well potential is higher than the ground potential so that the threshold voltage becomes low and the current flowing through N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* increases. Thus, there is an increase in the current flowing only into a node which requires that retention. The potential of a node holding the H level within a memory cell is retained by this current. The threshold voltage of an access transistor making an access to the node holding the H level data is lowered due to the substrate bias effect.

Here, as in the first embodiment, the leakage current of the access transistor can be set to an appropriate value by setting the potential of a word line to an intermediate potential during standby.

Then at time t1, the read operation from memory cell **M1***b* begins.

Word line **WL1** and column select signal **DY1** attain the H level so that memory cell **M1***b* is selected. At this time, the potential of the unselected word line **WL2** is at a ground potential. When the potential of word line **WL1** is brought to the H level, the current flows from bit line **BL1** into node **N5** inside memory cell **M1***b*. Consequently, the potential of bit line **BL1** is lowered.

When a potential change ΔV of bit line **BL1** becomes greater than the flat band voltage of the PN junction, a forward current is caused to flow from the well of N-channel MOS transistor **82***b* which is an access transistor in the unselected memory cell **M3***b* toward a source connected to bit line **BL1**. The flat band voltage of the PN junction is the forward voltage applied to the PN junction that causes the

forward current of a value greater than or equal to a prescribed value to begin to flow.

Thus, potential change ΔV is set to a value not greater than the flat band voltage of the PN junction. For this purpose, the pulse width of internal clock signal INTT that is generated according to a rise of clock signal T is set to an appropriate value Therefore, the activation time of a word line is determined by setting the delay time of delay circuit **22** in internal clock generating circuit **2** shown in FIG. **2** in a suitable manner.

The potential change ΔV generated between bit lines BL**1** and /BL**1** is amplified by read/write circuit **5** and is output to the outside as input/output data signal DQ.

The current required for data retention can be further increased in the above-described configuration as well so that the data retention characteristic is improved.

Third Embodiment

FIG. **11** is a circuit diagram representing the configuration of memory cells M**1***c* and M**3***c* contained in the semiconductor memory device according to the third embodiment.

Memory cell M**1***c* differs from memory cell M**1***b* shown in FIG. **7** in that N-channel MOS transistor **76***c* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **76** and an N-channel MOS transistor **78***c* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **78**. The configuration of other parts is the same as that of memory cell M**1***b* so that the description thereof will not be repeated.

Memory cell M**3***c* differs from memory cell M**3***b* shown in FIG. **7** in that an N-channel MOS transistor **86***c* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **86** and an N-channel MOS transistor **88***c* replaces N-channel MOS transistor **88**. The configuration of other parts is the same as that of memory cell M**3***b* shown in FIG. **7** so that the description will not be repeated.

In each of N-channel MOS transistors **76***c*, **78***c*, **86***c*, and **88***c*, a gate is connected to a back gate.

In a memory cell according to the second embodiment shown in FIG. **7**, three different kinds of well potentials are required for each N-channel MOS transistor. On the other hand, only two kinds of well potentials are required in a memory cell shown in FIG. **11** so that, for instance, in memory cell M**1***c*, N-channel MOS transistors **72***b* and **78***c* can be formed within a common well, and N-channel MOS transistors **76***c* and **74***b* can be formed within a common well.

Consequently, the memory cell area can be reduced.

Moreover, when node N**5** holds the H level potential, node N**6** is at the L level and the gate potential and well potential of N-channel MOS transistor **76***c* attains the ground potential so that the data retention characteristic is the same as that of memory cell M**1***b* shown in FIG. **7**. In addition, forward currents flow through the PN junctions between the sources and the wells of N-channel MOS transistors **76***c* and **78***c* which are driver transistors when the power-supply potential is higher than the flat band voltage of the PN junction so that the power-supply potential is set to be no greater than the flat band voltage of the PN junction.

In such a configuration, a well can be shared by two transistors, and the layout area for the memory array portion can be reduced in size.

The reduction in the layout area is effected in the manner described below in relation to the drawings.

FIG. **12** is a cross sectional view showing the cross section of N-channel MOS transistors **74***b* and **76** shown in FIG. **7** according to the second embodiment.

As shown in FIG. **12**, P-wells **204** and **206** are formed on an N substrate **202**. N-type impurity regions **208** and **210** are formed within P-well **204**, and a gate oxide film **216** is formed on the main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **208** and **210**. A gate electrode **220** is formed above gate oxide film **216**.

N-type impurity regions **208** and **210**, gate oxide film **216**, and gate electrode **220** correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **74***b*.

N-type impurity regions **212** and **214** are formed within P-well **206**. A gate oxide film **218** is formed on the main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **212** and **214**. A gate electrode **228** is formed above gate oxide film **218**. An insulating film **224** for separating the transistors is provided in the region between N-type impurity regions **210** and **212**.

N-type impurity regions **212** and **214**, gate oxide film **218**, and gate electrode **228** correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **76**.

N-type impurity region **208** is connected to bit line /BL**1**. Gate electrode **220** is connected to word line WL**1**. N-type impurity region **210**, P-well **204**, and gate electrode **228** are connected to node N**6**.

N-type impurity region **212** is connected to node N**5**. N-type impurity region **214** and P-well **206** are coupled to a ground potential.

In the second embodiment, different potentials are provided to P-well **204** and P-well **206** so that a larger area was required to separate the two P-wells.

FIG. **13** is a cross sectional view related to the description of a cross section of a memory cell shown in FIG. **11**.

As shown in FIG. **13**, a P-well **234** is formed on an N substrate **232**. N-type impurity regions **238**, **240**, **242**, and **244** are formed within P-well **234**. Moreover, an insulating film **241** for separating the transistors is provided.

A gate oxide film **246** is formed on a main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **238** and **240**. A gate electrode **250** is formed above gate oxide film **246**.

A gate oxide film **248** is formed on the main surface in the region between N-type impurity regions **242** and **244**. A gate electrode **252** is formed above gate oxide film **248**.

N-type impurity regions **238** and **240**, gate oxide film **246**, and gate electrode **250** correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **74***b* in FIG. **11**.

N-type impurity regions **242** and **244**, gate oxide film **248**, and gate electrode **252** correspond to N-channel MOS transistor **76***c* shown in FIG. **11**.

N-type impurity region **238** is connected to bit line /BL**1**. Gate electrode **250** is connected to word line WL**1**.

N-type impurity region **240**, P-well **234**, and gate electrode **252** are connected to node N**6**. N-type impurity region **242** is connected to node N**5**. N-type impurity region **244** is coupled to a ground potential.

As seen from FIG. **13**, a common potential can be provided to the well portion of N-channel MOS transistor **74***b* and the well portion of N-channel MOS transistor **76***c* so that N-channel MOS transistors **74***b* and **76***c* can be formed within one well in the memory cell shown in FIG. **11**. Thus, the example shown in FIG. **13** has area advantage over the example shown in FIG. **12** in that there is no need to provide a well-separating region.

Although the present invention has been described and illustrated in detail, it is clearly understood that the same is by way of illustration and example only and is not to be taken by way of limitation, the spirit and scope of the present invention being limited only by the terms of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor memory device formed on a main surface of a semiconductor substrate, comprising:

a memory array including a plurality of memory cells arranged in a matrix of rows and columns;

a plurality of word lines respectively provided to rows of said plurality of memory cells; and

a plurality of bit line pairs respectively provided to columns of said plurality of memory cells and each including first and second bit lines, wherein

each of said plurality of memory cells includes

first and second access transistors, having their respective gates connected to a same one of said plurality of word lines, for connecting said first and second bit lines to first and second internal nodes, respectively,

a first driver transistor connected between a power-supply node to which an inactivating potential is provided and said first internal node and having a gate connected to said second internal node, and

a second driver transistor connected between said power-supply node to which the inactivating potential is provided and said second internal node and having a gate connected to said first internal node, said semiconductor memory device further comprising:

a row select circuit for selecting one of said plurality of word lines according to a row address signal and for providing an activating potential to a selected word line and providing an inactivating potential to unselected word lines when making an access to said memory array, and for providing to said plurality of word lines an intermediate potential between said activating potential and said inactivating potential when the access to said memory array is completed; and

a precharging circuit for precharging said plurality of bit lines after the access to said memory array is completed.

2. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **1**, wherein

said first and second access transistors are field-effect transistors with their respective back gates connected to said first and second internal nodes.

3. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **2**, wherein

said first access transistor is formed within a first well formed on said main surface,

said first well is electrically connected to said first internal node,

said second access transistor is formed within a second well formed on said main surface, and

said second well is electrically connected to said second internal node.

4. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **2**, wherein

said first access transistor includes

a first source region formed on an insulating film formed on said main surface,

a first drain region formed on said insulating film, and

a first body region formed on said insulating film and contacting both said first source region and said first drain region, said first body region being connected to said first internal node, and wherein

said second access transistor includes

a second source region formed on said insulating film,

a second drain region formed on said insulating film, and

a second body region formed on said insulating film and contacting both said second source region and said second drain region, said second body region being connected to said second internal node.

5. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **2**, further comprising an internal dock generating circuit for generating a clock pulse that defines an activation time during which one of said plurality of word lines is activated when making the access to said memory array, wherein

said row select circuit selects one of said plurality of word lines according to said clock pulse, and wherein

said activation time is a period of time during which a potential change, from a precharge voltage, generated on each of said plurality of bit line pairs is not greater than a flat band voltage of a PN junction when data is read from one of said plurality of memory cells.

6. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **5**, wherein the PN junction is between the back gate and an impurity region of said first access transistor in one of said plurality of word lines that is unselected, the impurity region connected to one line of each bit line pairs.

7. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **2**, wherein

said first driver transistor is a field-effect transistor with a back gate connected to said second internal node, and

said second driver transistor is a field-effect transistor with a back gate connected to said first internal node.

8. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **7**, wherein

said first access transistor and said second driver transistor are formed within a first well provided on said main surface, and

said second access transistor and said first driver transistor are formed within a second well provided on said main surface.

9. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **7**, wherein a potential difference between said activating potential and said inactivating potential is not greater than a flat band voltage of a PN junction.

10. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **9**, wherein

said first access transistor and said second driver transistor are formed within a first well provided on said main surface, and

said second access transistor and said first driver transistor are formed within a second well provided on said main surface.

11. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **9**, wherein the PN junction is the one between an impurity region and the back gate of each of said first and second driver transistors.

12. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **1**, wherein

said first and second access transistors are field-effect transistors, and

said intermediate potential is a potential that has shifted by an amount of a threshold voltage of said field-effect transistor from said inactivating potential toward said activating potential.

13. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **1**, wherein

the access to said memory array is made where an operation of selecting one of said plurality of word lines becomes one cycle, and

said precharging circuit precharges said plurality of bit line pairs every said one cycle.

14. The semiconductor memory device according to claim **1**, wherein

each of said plurality of memory cells further includes

a first capacitor having one end connected to said first internal node and other end coupled to a first constant potential, and

a second capacitor having one end connected to said second internal node and other end coupled to a second constant potential.

* * * * *